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SUBJECT: EU DIPLOMATS PREDICT LITTLE PROGRESS WITH TURKEY  
IN 2009

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone for reas  
ons 1.4 b and d.

**¶11. (C) Summary.** A quick survey of EU diplomats in Paris in November 2008 produced consensus that expectations for Turkey-EU relations in 2009 should be modest. Though the incoming Czech and then Swedish EU presidencies are more pro-Turkey than President Sarkozy's France, our contacts agree with the November EU report that Turkish reforms are lagging and that the slow opening of accession chapters will remain, at best, at the current rate of two per presidency. There have been positive developments in Turkey-EU relations this year, with Turkey emerging as a more "strategic" regional partner, as demonstrated by its constructive role in the Caucasus, facilitating Israel-Syria exchanges, and initial outreach to Armenia. Ongoing Cyprus negotiations could also produce progress towards an eventual unblocking of cooperation between Turkey and the EU, as well as between the EU and NATO. Despite the controversy provoked by Turkey's last-minute request for a Deputy Secretary General position at the Union for the Mediterranean ministerial in early November, none of our interlocutors raised the issue as likely to color EU-Turkey relations next year. Nonetheless, these diplomats conclude that negative dynamics are likely to prevail in EU-Turkish relations in 2009, especially with elections in Germany, the European Parliament, and Turkey itself in which the issue of Turkey-EU relations may be divisive. We note that President Sarkozy remains opposed to Turkish EU Accession and the best his EU partners can hope for is that that his pragmatic approach to allow negotiations on chapters of the *acquis* that do not presuppose EU membership will continue, even if there is no change in the overall French position against Turkish membership in the future. End summary.

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CZECH EU PRESIDENCY  
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**¶12. (C)** Czech diplomat Marketa Cermakova reiterated on November 14 support for Turkish accession and desire to maintain the momentum of accession negotiations. She said the incoming Czech presidency is optimistic that Turkish reforms will enable the opening of two or three chapters during the Czech presidency. The Czech presidency team is currently focused on chapters no. 16 (taxation) and 19 (social policy and employment), conditioned of course on Turkish progress towards the criteria and developments in the final weeks of the French presidency. She noted that the Czech Republic would also like to open chapter no. 15 (energy), which is blocked for political reasons. The Czech goals for Turkey-EU relations were affirmed in a November 6 bilateral meeting in Ankara as part of the incoming Czech presidency's "tour of capitals" of both EU members and candidate states.

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GERMAN ELECTIONS

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¶3. (C) FM Kouchner's advisor for Franco-German relations, German exchange diplomat Irmgard Maria Fellner (please protect), said on November 17 that she expected Turkey-EU engagement to slow during a 2009 German federal election season in which this will likely be a divisive issue. German FM Steinmeier, who will challenge Chancellor Merkel in the elections scheduled for September 2009, has come out vocally in support of Turkish EU accession and has rallied some prominent German citizens of Turkish origin to his cause.

¶4. (C) On the other hand, German diplomat Barbara Wolf said that Merkel's party would seek to keep Turkey from becoming a major issue in the German federal elections as well as in the 2009 European Parliamentary elections. However, Wolf said these social issues are so volatile that an incident could easily occur to bring differences with Turkey into focus in Germany (such as in 2007, when the public was scandalized by the eight-month incarceration of a German 17-year-old in Turkey awaiting trial for the alleged rape of a younger teenager). However, she dismissed Steinmeier's recent profession of support for Turkish accession as one of many "trial balloons," noting that the combined votes of the German Green Party, citizens of Turkish descent, and any other pro-Turkey constituencies would alone not have enough clout to determine the election in Steinmeier's favor. That said, both diplomats agreed that a surprise Steinmeier victory in late 2009 could dissolve the Franco-German understanding that, under Merkel and Sarkozy, has been the cornerstone of today's EU reticence towards Turkey.

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TURKISH ELECTIONS AND PUBLIC OPINION  
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¶5. (C) Wolf also noted that her counterparts at the German Embassy in Ankara expect Turkey's local elections in March 2009 to have a very negative impact on Turkey-EU relations, simply because EU accession is not a priority of the governing AKP party. However, most of our interlocutors remarked on the deterioration in the "second track" of Turkey-EU relations: serious public opinion problems on both sides. Turkish diplomat Ahmet Aydin Dogan noted that the French EU presidency had offered France an opportunity to improve its poor image in Turkey, which France will likely "miss" when only two accession chapters are opened. One effort to address the lack of mutual understanding is a planned French-Turkish "cultural season" beginning summer ¶2009. (Dogan noted that the idea began at a low point of bilateral relations in 2006, under then-President Chirac). Dogan reported that municipalities throughout France have expressed interest in the programs, which he says will focus on breaking down stereotypes, for example by emphasizing modern culture and women's rights. Wolf expressed some doubt, however, about the cultural season's having a sizeable impact in France, noting that the Turkish government has often failed to represent Turkish society as modern and dynamic.

¶6. (C) General "enlargement fatigue" is another concern that our contacts acknowledge exists throughout the EU, even in member-states that are otherwise favorable to the Turkish cause. At the other end of the spectrum, an Austrian diplomatic colleague recently offered a lengthy exposition on Turkey's incompatibility with Europe, starting with religious differences with a Christian Europe. Regardless, the lack of movement in the overall accession process tends to reinforce low public opinion towards Turkish accession, with the number of those "undecided" about Turkey's candidacy falling in all opinion polls.

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COMMENT

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¶7. (C) While deferring to Ankara and other European posts for definitive assessments of their government positions and public opinions, the outlook among EU diplomats in Paris remains gloomy for EU-Turkey relations in 2009. With the exception of a breakthrough in the Cyprus negotiations or, perhaps, a change in the German government position after the September 2009 German federal elections, the negative dynamics currently outweigh the positive ones. On the bilateral front, the Turkish Embassy in Paris is committed to the cultural season effort, giving us an energetic overview of the initiative, backed by an analytical framework of how different public constituencies in France might be influenced. We note that President Sarkozy's pragmatism has probably reached its limits with an effective compromise on continuing to open accession chapters without guaranteeing that they lead to accession. End comment.

STAPLETON